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GCC drive to deliver more than 75 tons of food

Blizzard of volunteers make food drive 'a true blessing.'

By **ALICIA GALLEGOS**
Tribune Staff Writer

SOUTH BEND — The temperature may have been icy and the snow downright blinding, but that didn't for a second stop volunteers Saturday with their mission to help those in need.

The annual food drop, organized by Granger Community Church and helped by several other churches and organizations, was set to distribute more than 75 tons of food to food pantries and to homes in South Bend, Mishawaka, Elkhart, Plymouth and Niles.

Like the snowflakes themselves, the helpers scattered across sidewalks, front yards, pavements and streets beginning at 10:30 a.m., seemingly unfazed by the piles of still-falling powder.

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"At first I was worried when I saw how it was snowing this morning," said Shannon Papp, food pantry coordinator at Monroe Circle Community Center. "(But) it wasn't a factor. In fact, it might have been a bit of encouragement."

Monroe Circle was one of dozens of Michiana organizations and church stops along the route.

Granger Community Church senior pastor Mark Beeson said in a news release that the food drop was timed this year for the difficult months of January and February, when

donations typically slow down.

For La Casa de Amistad, Director Rebecca Ruvalcaba agreed the annual drive couldn't have come at a better time. The youth and adult center in South Bend has a food pantry serving more than 50 families a day.



Tribune Photos/JIM RIDER

Tricia Smith, in light blue coat, and Lisa Hinkle, in white coat, join other members of Granger Community Church to unload semi-trucks and load smaller trucks Saturday bound for food pantries and the needy around Michiana.

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Since last year, the number of families served has doubled, Ruvalcaba said, and were at an all-time high in December.

"I believe it's really our economic state," she said. "Our unemployment, a lot of our clients are unemployed. Our numbers for the elderly have (also) increased."

The director called the timing of the food drop "a true blessing."

Outside of La Casa, volunteers made an assembly line and handed boxes down the line and into the facility to be stored.

Tim Papp, truck coordinator for the event, was near the front of the line directing volunteers and managing the truckloads. A total of 14 trucks were making their way through the snow on Saturday to deliver food, a task that Papp has been a part of for the last five years, he said.

"It's my way of giving back and volunteering," he said. "It's not from the pocketbook, but it's with my own time and that means a lot."

Just down the road, off of Western Avenue, more volunteers were circling homes inside the South Bend Housing Authority and distributing boxes to Monroe Circle Community Center.

At one door was Bruno DeJesus and his twin sons, Tiago and Alex, 5, who knocked and delivered a box to resident Linda Anthony.

"Happy New Year," the boys shouted happily to the woman as she took her package.

DeJesus said he wants to raise his children in an environment where they realize how fortunate they are and the importance of helping others.

When asked why he enjoyed helping out with the event, 5-year-old Tiago said, "to serve. Some kids don't have food."

Residents receiving the packages were more than appreciative for the extra food, including Anthony.

"It's a lot of help," she said.

Inside the Housing Authority apartment complex, Greg Barr also was gracious after he was handed his box. Having moved in just three days before, Barr was not expecting the food package.

"It's good that people are coming out to do this," he said. "God be blessin' me."

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